

OPENING STATEMENT

Good afternoon. I want to extend a warm welcome to our witnesses. Thank you all for making the trip to testify before us – especially President Harvier of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community of Phoenix, Arizona. It’s good to see you here.

Today we will be discussing a topic that touches every corner of Indian Country: tribal infrastructure. Making sure tribes have the federal resources and support they need to maintain safe and functional infrastructure in their communities is a key part of our federal trust responsibility.

Modern and reliable infrastructure is also an essential element of tribal sovereignty, safety, and economic development. Indian Country cannot thrive when infrastructure needs go unmet and construction backlogs linger over decades.

Unfortunately, that is exactly the position we find ourselves in today.

Roads in Indian Country continue to rank among the most undeveloped and undermaintained in the United States.

According to the 2019 National Tribal Transportation Facility Inventory, there are approximately 161,000 miles of roads and trails in Indian Country that are in need of federal funding.

This past Monday, there were reports of a flash flood that washed out a section of highway on the Standing Rock Sioux reservation in North Dakota, which created a chasm that is 40 feet wide and 70 feet deep and resulted in multiple injuries and even fatalities.

This kind of catastrophic flooding is quickly becoming the new normal as climate change begins to impact our everyday lives. Indian Country, as well as other rural and minority communities, has always been on the front lines of climate change.

But without strong and well-maintained infrastructure to mitigate negative impacts, Indian Country will continue to disproportionately suffer as a result of changes in weather patterns and worsening natural disasters.

Infrastructure investment is not only tied to the public safety of roads, bridges, and buildings on tribal lands.

It also serves an important economic purpose in tribal communities. Without reliable transportation systems for community members and visitors, tribes may not be able to take advantage of economic development opportunities.

Infrastructure investment also is a tool for economic development, establishing projects that create good paying jobs located in and around Indigenous communities.

Infrastructure improvement clearly belongs at the core of our priorities when it comes to honoring our trust responsibility and promoting prosperity in Indian Country.

That is why I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about the unique infrastructure needs of their communities in addition to what we can do to help address them.

I would now like to recognize Ranking Member Cook for his opening remarks.